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AUTHOR Elliott, Donna; May, Susan A.
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ABSTRACT

In light of the increasing emphasis on "vocationalism"--preparing students for work--in education and the media today, a model is proposed through which the major components of this "new vocationalism" could be operationalized. The model integrates academic and vocational education. It involves a total system change in education that describes the focus of learning in four different phases within a continuum: (1) K-9, exploratory based; (2) 10-12, experiential based; (3) postsecondary, employment driven; and (4) business and industry, needs driven. Encompassing kindergarten through postsecondary levels, this four-phase model allows students to experience both school-based and work-based activities. Several common threads run throughout the model, enhancing student learning and the ability to apply knowledge. These threads include the following: career counseling, core abilities, applied and integrated curriculum, seamless transition of learning, instructors as facilitators, and using technology. For this model to be viable, instructors at all grade levels would need to be flexible, competent, and adaptable to change. Close working relationships with business and industry are imperative to the success of the students. In order for all instructors to be credible and competent, they must continue to develop themselves professionally beyond what is required of state licensure or certification and instill this value of lifelong learning in their students. This proposed model is a "snapshot" of a possible future for vocational education. It is an approach that students, employers, and communities will need, and are requesting, in order to prepare for excellence in the work force. (KC)

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THE NEW VOCATIONALISM: A POTENTIAL MODEL

Trends and Issues in Vocational, Technical, and Occupational Education

Donna Elliott and Susan A. May

Fox Valley Technical College

Susan A. Torbenson

Chicago Cluster

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Introduction

W. Norton Grubb (1996) asserts that "vocationalism is rampant once again" (p. 535) indicating that there has been a growing pressure on schools to prepare workers better for the economic imperatives of the next century. Grubb provides an extensive overview of what he refers to as the "new vocationalism" and the various "strands" or thinking relative to this renewed interest in the occupational purposes of education, focusing primarily on the high school level (pp. 535-546).

There are several key components that emerge within the "new vocationalism." One component is the integration of academic and vocational education, resulting in applied, contextual learning. This integration is broadly supported by the current and projected nature of work. A second component involves the changing role of the instructor and the movement toward learner-centered educational environments. A third component is that of broadened importance and applicability. Education, in general, needs to become more relevant, applied, and embrace some "vocational" elements if reform is to positively impact all students. Finally, the needs of local communities must direct the types of contextual and integrated teaching and learning systems which frame the lifelong continuum of education.

In this article, we propose a potential model through which the major components of the "new vocationalism" could be operationalized. One fundamental difference in Grubb's (1996) "new vocationalism" and this proposal, is that the model does not continue a distinct separation between academic programs and vocational programs. If we are really paying attention to what employers are saying from an economic perspective, what our community agencies are saying from a social perspective, and what is happening at work and at home from a technological

perspective, it is quite clear that all members of our society, young and old, need BOTH academic and vocational preparation.

The proposed model involves a total system change in education which describes the focus of learning in four different phases within a continuum. It also provides a framework of common threads running through all states of this model, and attempts to describe further the new role of the former "vocational" instructor.

Description of the Model

The proposed model (see Figure 1) for the "new vocationalism" encompasses the following four phases of the educational continuum, beginning with kindergarten and moving through an individual's work life in business/industry/community settings: Kindergarten through 9th Grade: Exploratory-Based, Grades 10 through 12: Experiential-Based, Post-secondary: Employment-Driven, and Business and Industry: Needs-Driven. The model serves as a simple framework for the education and work experiences that individuals would encounter. Such a model would provide an environment in which synergy would be created between school-based learning and work-based learning for all learners, eliminating the notion of separate academic and vocational "tracks."

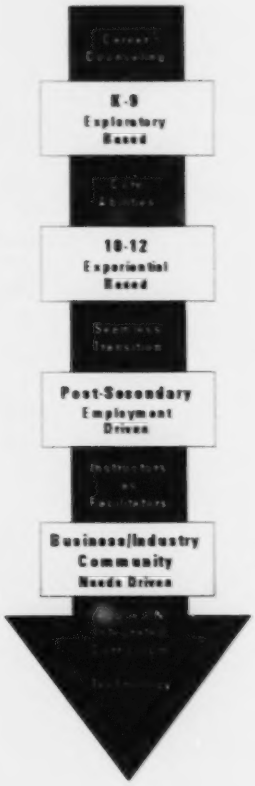

Figure 1. Proposed model for the "new vocationalism"

Phase I: Kindergarten-9th Grade: Exploratory-Based

During this early developmental phase, occupational play is built into the curriculum. Children are given the opportunity to "play" and pretend in a variety of roles in a variety of settings, considering occupational options that expand far beyond the traditional, and usually gender-biased, careers of doctor, firefighter, teacher, policeman, and nurse. This "exploratory" phase puts heavy emphasis on children's exposure to the wide array of exciting career options and allows for a wide variety of strategies for exploration of these occupational areas, limited only by the creative capacities and resource parameters of local schools. During this phase, children are also challenged to begin thinking about their career interests in a number of areas through structured learning activities and instruments designed to focus on their interests. The building of self-esteem is another important aspect of this exploratory-based phase, building the confidence of young people to pursue the life and career goals they may have.

Phase II: Grades 10-12: Experiential-Based

When students enter the last few years of compulsory education (grades 10-12), the focus of the educational experience becomes much more individualized and, therefore, more relevant to the development of the student. At this point, a customized learning plan is developed with and for each individual student. A key driver of the customized learning plan is an in-depth assessment of each student's interests, goals, aptitudes, skills, and abilities. With this, the direction for the learning experiences at these grade levels will be mapped out, with appropriate modifications made in process. The customized learning plan, for all students, is made up of some combination of school-based learning and work-based learning. Three sources of input are critical

to the development of an effective customized learning plan: the student, the parent/guardian, and the career development instructor assigned to the student.

School-based learning is an important component of this stage of the model, incorporating as much direct application of theory as possible to provide a sense of relevance to students. School-based learning is also very important to students at this age in terms of their social and interpersonal development.

Work-based learning can consist of a variety of experiences, with old labels or new labels, but essentially provides students with work experience. The fundamental reason for providing some form of work experience for all students is to develop their understanding of workplace basics in the context of employer/employee/co-worker relations, the value of promptness and attendance, building awareness of a given industry, and further exploring and identifying a career direction. Work-based learning can include co-operative education placements, internships, youth apprenticeships, and in-school jobs as interns, work-studies, or in entrepreneurial centers. Again, work-based learning opportunities need to be developed by faculty, in conjunction with employers, and reflect training and job needs of the community.

Phase III: Post-Secondary: Employment-Driven

For students who pursue formal post-secondary education in fields other than areas such as liberal arts, the focus at the post-secondary level needs to be that of workforce education and development. This is particularly true in community and technical colleges where preparation for work and career channels needs to remain central to the missions of these institutions. The new challenge posed by this model for community and technical colleges is that of packaging educational experiences in occupational clusters rather than the very narrow occupational training

"programs" that have existed for many years. The current and future needs of the workplace point toward employees who are "multi-skilled," "cross-trained," and extremely adaptable to a variety of work functions across any given industry. Specific programming in preparation for employment in jobs such as "physical therapist," "computer programmer," "welder," and "press operator" are unlikely to meet the future demands of the changing workplace.

School-based learning is an important component of this phase as well, providing students with the necessary applied academics in support of their occupational training. School-based learning will, undoubtedly, experience a tremendous increase in the use of instructional and learning technologies, providing new meaning to what it means to be "school-based."

At the post-secondary level, the work-based component needs to take on a broader than usual dimension to somewhat mirror the notion of training for a multi-skilled occupational cluster. The work-based assignments need to include more than one specific experience and job function, giving students a broader experience base across the industry for which they are preparing to work. Work-based education at the post-secondary level can consist of apprenticeship training, internships, practicums, clinical and business-based "laboratories," work-study or school-based internships, and actual full- or part-time employment.

Phase IV: Business and Industry: Needs-Driven

In the work setting, the education and training needs of both employers and employees will continue to increase. Changing technology, technological upgrades, and organizational restructuring will create an on-going demand for the training, retraining, and upskilling at all levels and functions within the workforce. Liddell (1994) suggests that continuous learning systems in firms and industries will be needed to promote constant improvement in the quality of

goods and services (p. 8). America's business and industry sector is grappling with local, national, and international competitive forces to maintain the foundation of a strong economy for this nation. Technology is key to competitiveness in today's workplace, but not only technology in terms of equipment, automation, and manufacturing processes. Human resource technology is also critical if companies are to have highly skilled and continuously trained workers to effectively utilize the changing "hard" technologies.

School-based learning will continue to be an important resource for both employers and employees in addressing education and training needs, although school-based learning will need to become much more flexible, responsive, and customized in its delivery to meet these ever-changing needs. Rapidly changing technology and the challenges of international competition will require individuals to change occupations and retrain for these new occupations a number of times in their working lives. "The diversity, flexibility, and quality of the U.S. schools, colleges, and universities will be the key pegs upon which the individuals in our society will hang their collective hats of hope" (Parnell, 1990, p. 76).

Work-based learning is a natural in the employment setting with on-the-job training (OJT), in-house training, apprenticeships, the use of consultants and contracted training, mentorships, and the use of a number of educational technologies to support learning. Employees, can no longer rely on their employers to provide for their total range of education and training needs. They will need to be independent learners in search of the kinds of skills and abilities that will keep them competitive in the workforce. As noted by Bridges (1994), "security will come first and foremost from being an attractive prospect to employers, and that attractiveness involves having the abilities and attitudes that an employer needs at the moment" (p. 56). Bridges further

suggests that "workers who don't keep up a self-managed program of continuing education will fall behind and will lose out on the opportunities" (p. 168).

Common Threads

Conceptually and philosophically, there are several common "threads," that are integrated through this model of "new vocationalism." Each thread, although independent in concept, supports the total development of the student as a productive citizen and worker. These common threads, include career counseling, core abilities, seamless transition of learning, instructors as facilitators, applied and integrated curriculum, and the utilization of technology.

Career counseling would begin in kindergarten with the early years being very exploratory, focusing on career clusters and student interests. Career counseling would become more specialized and occupationally focused as the student moves to the experiential-based learning in the 10th to 12th grades. At the post-secondary level, students would receive career counseling to help ensure occupational "fit," to discuss additional and future career options, and understand the transferable skills the student has acquired that might lead to additional or optional employment. Career counseling for an employed individual would target current and future needs of the individual including additional training and professional development. In general, career counseling helps the student or individual identify interests and abilities, understand future occupational needs, and provides a development plan to help reach career goals.

Core abilities, the next common thread which runs through the model, are generally defined as skills that are used in today's workplace, and can be easily categorized into thinking, communication, and attitude skills. Core abilities include workplace socialization skills, cooperation/collaboration skills, decision making and problem solving, and symbolic/analytical

skills (Hamm & Mundhenk, 1995, p.14). In addition, the life skill of learning to learn is also a core ability of the model. As students move through the model, each concept is developed more comprehensively and provides a solid base to build future learning and work experiences.

The seamless transition of learning is the third thread supporting this model. Seamless transition refers to the ability of the student to move easily from one grade level to another, or from one institution to another without losing credit for outcomes already achieved. An educational system that is seamless would allow a student to complete a high school youth apprenticeship program and receive credit at the post-secondary level toward a technical diploma, go out into the workforce, and later return to a post-secondary institution and apply both the technical diploma and the work experience for credit toward an associate degree. This same student would then be able to apply the associate degree credits already earned toward a baccalaureate program. This seamless system would acknowledge learning and skills that have been obtained through traditional and non-traditional, credit and non-credit, experiences including work experience, seminars, or coursework.

Another common thread that runs through this "new vocationalism" model is the concept of instructors as facilitators. In this model, instructors are not viewed as "experts" in a subject area but work with students to help them gather and analyze information in order to learn. In addition, they help students to become resourceful lifetime learners. The emerging role of the instructor is more thoroughly discussed in the next section.

In this model, career education curriculum is both applied and integrated throughout the educational phases. The separatism between academic and vocational education would no longer exist, but would be linked together for greater and more comprehensive preparation of students

for work and for life. Vocational and academic instructors would work together at all grade levels to develop applied and integrated curriculum to meet this standard. Curriculum would be progressive, moving from grade level to grade level, and building upon past outcomes.

The understanding and use of technology is the final underlying thread that runs through this model. At each grade level, students would be exposed to and use technology as it relates to both school-based and work-based education. This immediate instruction in the latest technology would help to give a student the competitive edge in the workforce. In addition, technology will be used to deliver instruction in alternative ways at both the school and work site.

New Role of the Former "Vocational" Instructor

The role of the present vocational education teacher would be significantly changed in this model. Vocational educators would no longer be discipline experts in specialized fields but would have expanded and broader roles in the K-12 systems. Current secondary vocational instructors would need to be trained to provide work focused services to all students at all secondary grade levels. Future instructors would enroll in the "college or department of career development education" and receive training to work with students in career development at all secondary school grade levels. No longer called a vocational teacher, the new career development instructor would be trained in the foundations of vocational and occupational education and would serve as specialists in schools to ensure that work-based learning, work-based curriculum, and career counseling are implemented in each of the model's four phases. Career development instructors would work together with basic skills instructors at all grade levels to ensure that the core abilities are developed throughout each grade and that work-based learning is an integral part of the curriculum.

At the K-9 grade levels, the career development instructor would work with other K-9 faculty to ensure that career exploration is a major focus in the basic skills curriculum. The career development instructor would serve as a curriculum specialist to help integrate applied work-focused activities into the very important basic skills courses needed to build the foundation for future, more challenging, and comprehensive activities. The major focus for the student, at this time, is to build a good foundation of basic skills and to receive exposure to a multitude of career opportunities.

During the last three years of secondary school, grades 10 through 12, the role of the career development instructor would expand from the K-9 role to also include work in developing with students and their parent or guardian, customized learning plans that will help guide students to appropriate work experiences. These instructors would also serve as the coordinators of these work-based learning activities, working with students, parents, and employers to help achieve student success. These work-based learning activities would be required of all students in grades 10 through 12 and provide authentic work experience for students to make the connection and transition between school and work. The work experience would help students to make linkages between classroom theory and work-based applications, and also gain insights about their prior classroom learning (Kubiak, Page, & Riggio, 1995. p 63). In addition, the career development instructor would serve as an internal consultant to the school district that employs them, and as an external consultant to both the business partnerships that help to provide the work experience sites, and to the post-secondary schools that will help develop specialized work skills in their graduates.

At the post-secondary level, career development instructors would function as both generalists and specialists in career cluster fields. As generalists they would provide career focused services similar to those in the secondary schools including advisement, aiding in the development of customized learning plans for students, and providing curriculum specialty services. As career cluster specialists they would train students in work-specific skills identified by business and industry. Instruction for these skills, and the necessary required basic skills would be integrated and team taught by occupational and academic instructors. Instructors at this level need to be well versed in new technology, be highly flexible and adaptable to change, and be able to assess needs and deliver instruction in a variety ways to meet changing needs.

Post-secondary instructors would need to be leading edge practitioners, having recent and relevant experience in the career field in which they instruct. Post-secondary institutions and the business and industry they serve might establish partnerships to employ a single individual that works in business on a part-time basis and instructs at the college on a part-time basis, allowing the individual to be employed full-time and receive full-time benefits while maintaining a high level of skill competence. This would allow the instructor the ability to identify and modify curriculum for a changing workplace as needed, providing new skills to students to ensure placement upon program, certificate or course completion. In addition, instructors would continually be exposed to the new technologies and organizational dynamics of their given industry.

Instructors that provide business and industry based training would need to fulfill all the roles that have been discussed previously, but would need to be even more flexible and adaptable to identified needs. These instructors would function as customized curriculum developers and

customized trainers, providing just-in-time training in the workplace. The provision of technical assistance to these industries would also be a major role of their position.

Conclusion

This article suggests a model for the "new vocationalism," designed to help students prepare for the future workforce. Educating students kindergarten through post-secondary levels, this four phase model allows students to experience both school-based and work-based activities, utilizing occupational play at the elementary grades, and authentic work experience at grades 10 through post-secondary. Several common threads run throughout the model enhancing student learning and the ability to apply knowledge. These threads include career counseling, core abilities, applied and integrated curriculum, seamless transition of learning, instructors as facilitators, and utilizing technology. They help to support the total development of the student into a productive citizen and worker.

For this model to be viable, instructors at all grade levels would need to be flexible, competent, and adaptable to change. Close working relationships with business and industry are imperative to the success of the students that faculty in this model help to direct. No longer will the occupational training that faculty obtained years ago be relevant to the demands of this model. In order for all instructors to be credible and competent, they must continue to professionally develop themselves beyond what is required of state licensure or certification, and instill this value of learning throughout their lives, in their students.

This proposed model is a "snapshot" of a possible future for vocational education. It is based on an integrated and applied approach of both academics and vocational education, and is provided to all students, grades kindergarten through post-secondary levels. We believe that this

approach is what students, employers, and communities will need, and are requesting, in order to prepare for excellence in the American workforce.

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